

MEASUREMENT OF ILLUMINATION CONDITIONS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to measurement of illumination conditions. It is particularly
5 related to adjustment of white balance. White balance means the proportional
intensities of the colours that human eye can detect.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

When recording electronic images or making video recordings with an electronic
10 camera (for example a video camera), it is preferable to compensate for the
illumination conditions since the white balance of the illumination may vary
depending upon the source of the illumination. For example, artificial illumination
usually produces light having a colour spectrum that differs from that of natural
light. Therefore, if artificial illumination is used, the red, green and blue
15 components reflected from an object differ from those reflected by the object when
illuminated by sunlight. The human visual system automatically adapts to the white
balance of light, and at least partially compensates for the white balance of the
illuminating light. Electrical image generation often produces an unnatural image
unless some form of compensation is used.

20 To deal with this problem, an electronic camera or a video recording device may
comprise individual measuring units provided for each major light component (that
is, red, green and blue), each unit comprising an optical filter adjacent to an
electronic detector. The light components are parts of the electromagnetic
25 spectrum, that is colour bands comprising one or more adjacent electromagnetic
frequencies. The electronic detector is typically an optical-to-electronic signal
converter such as a photodiode. The optical filters provide narrow colour bands
corresponding to the respective light components. Thus, the intensities of the
colour components can be measured at narrow bands corresponding to the bands
30 at which the detectors receive light. Using such an arrangement, it is relatively
easy to adjust the colour balance between the three colour components to
produce an electronic image having a more natural appearance. An example of

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such an arrangement is described in US 5,021,874, which discloses measuring light intensity with a light intensity measuring sensor and measuring the respective intensities of red and blue components with colour filters and photodiodes. The intensities of red and blue components are used to adjust the corresponding proportions of light components in a captured video image.

An alternative way to deal with this problem uses a specific White Balance Algorithm (WBA) to process the signals received from the detectors of an imaging unit in order to estimate the balance of the colours in the illuminating light. In this way, dedicated colour balance measuring detectors are not required.

There are drawbacks with the methods known from the prior art. Dedicated colour filters and detectors are space consuming. Furthermore, they increase production costs and add complexity. Alternatively, if optical image information is used in isolation for white balancing, this requires complex algorithms, and so sufficient computing and memory capabilities must be provided. Increased computing and memory capabilities generally lead to a higher power consumption, a greater price and greater complexity. In addition, additional components must be accommodated.

The size of a device and the power consumed by it are important issues in the case of small hand-held devices such as mobile telephones. These issues will be even more important in the future. Forthcoming mobile telephones are likely not only to be suitable for pure audiophonic communication but also for still image capture and video conferencing.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to a first aspect of the invention there is provided a white balance measurement unit for measuring the intensity of at least two light components making up an illuminating light, characterised in that

said white balance measurement unit comprises at least one LED (Light Emitting Diode) for generating an electronic measurement signal corresponding to

the intensity of at least one of said light components in said illuminating light.

According to a second aspect of the invention there is provided a white balance adjustment device comprising a white balance measurement unit for measuring the intensity of at least two light components making up an illuminating light, characterised in that

said white balance measurement unit comprises at least one LED (Light Emitting Diode) for generating an electronic measurement signal corresponding to the intensity of at least one of said light components in said illuminating light.

Preferably, the device has means for adjusting colour balance of an electrically recorded image using the electronic measurement signal.

Preferably, the device comprises at least one LED that is arranged to be used both for white balance adjustment and for exposure control.

According to a third aspect of the invention there is provided a recording device for recording an image in an electronic form comprising:

a white balance adjustment device comprising a white balance measurement unit for measurement of the intensity of at least two light components making up an illuminating light, characterised in that

said white balance measurement unit comprises an LED (Light Emitting Diode) for generating an electronic measurement signal corresponding to the intensity of at least one of said light components in said illuminating light, and

the recording device comprises a means for capturing an electronic image of an object.

Preferably, the recording device has means for adjusting balance of at least two colour components of the captured electronic image on the basis of the measured intensity of illuminating light of at least two light components.

According to an embodiment of the invention, the recording device has telecommunications means for transmitting the captured electronic image.

Preferably the recording device is a mobile telephone.

- 5 According to a fourth aspect of the invention there is provided a method for white balance measurement comprising the steps of:

measuring the intensity of at least two components of illuminating light, characterised in that

- 10 the measuring of intensity of at least one of said components is carried out by an LED (Light Emitting Diode).

According to a fifth aspect of the invention there is provided a method for white balance adjustment comprising the steps of:

- 15 recording an electronic image comprising at least two colour elements, measuring the intensity of at least two components of illuminating light, characterised in that the measuring of intensity of at least one of said components is carried out by an LED (Light Emitting Diode), and

- 20 adjusting the balance of the colour elements on the basis of the measured intensity of illuminating light of at least two light components.

- 25 The reverse current passing through an LED can be used to measure an illuminating light component. In an embodiment of the invention, the same LED is used alternately for radiating one light component and for sensing the intensity of one light component, these components not necessarily corresponding to same colour band.

- Advantageously, by using two or more LEDs that are sensitive to different colours, it is possible to provide in a compact size individual colour band intensity measurement means for two or more colour bands.

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Preferably, intensity measurement of a colour band is carried out using an LED, without any coloured glass or plastics as an optical filter, since LEDs have an

intrinsic property of measuring only a narrow colour band. This reduces space requirements, simplifies design and facilitates the assembly of white balance adjustment devices. The invention can be used in partial combination with prior art solutions, for example one of the light components may be measured using a prior art arrangement with a colour filter and a sensor assembled into a unit. This may be advantageous for providing high sensitivity measurements in case of some light components.

The present invention is suitable for all electronic image recording devices and in particular, though not necessarily, for those that can use available artificial light illuminating an object. Such devices include digital still cameras, digital video cameras, analogue video cameras, TV-cameras, surveillance devices and video teleconferencing devices.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention will now be described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

- Figure 1 is a block diagram of a prior art white balance adjustment device for use in a camera according to US 5,021,874;
- Figure 2 is a circuit diagram of a white balance measurement unit according to an embodiment of the invention; and
- Figure 3 is a block diagram of a mobile station according to an embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Figure 1 shows a white balance adjustment unit 4 according to the prior art (US 5,021,874) for use in an electronic camera. The camera has a Charge Coupled Device (CCD) array as a pickup part 10 for generating electronic image signals 20R, 20G and 20B corresponding to the intensities of red, green and blue light components present in light collected by a lens 14. The white balance adjustment unit 4 comprises a white balance measuring unit 34 for measuring the intensities of individual red and blue light components of illuminating light 40. The white

balance measuring device 34 comprises a white balance measuring unit WMH1, a logarithmic conversion circuit 44 for processing the output of the white balance measuring unit WMH1, a subtraction circuit 48 and an amplifier 52. The white balance measuring unit contains separate sensors for measuring red (38R,42R) and for measuring blue (38B,42B) light components. Each sensor comprises a colour filter 42R,42B (for example a piece of coloured glass) and a photodiode 38R,38B for generating electronic signals corresponding to the intensity of the red and blue light components of illuminating light 40. These signals are input to the logarithmic conversion circuit 44, where the signals are logarithmically compressed into compressed colour signals R and B corresponding to intensities of the red and blue colour components. The subtraction circuit 48 determines a difference between the two components R and B of the illuminating light 40. A signal 50 representing this difference is amplified by the amplifier 52 to produce an amplified difference signal 36 forming the output of the white balance measuring device 34.

The amplified difference signal 36 produced by the white balance measuring device 34 is received by an A/D converter of the white balance adjustment device 4. The A/D converter generates a digital signal DT representing the difference of the intensities of the red and blue colour components of the illuminating light 40. The digital signal DT is then fed to a control part 16.

The overall intensity of the illuminating light 40 is measured by a light intensity measuring sensor 33. The light intensity measuring sensor 33 is usually a photodiode or a phototransistor without any coloured filters. The light intensity measuring sensor 33 measures the intensity of a broad band of light spectrum. The output of this sensor 33 is converted from analogue to digital form by an A/D converter 54 and then fed to the control part 16.

The control part 16 receives an input D_T based on the electronic signals R and B and an input BV based on the overall intensity of the illuminating light 40. The control part 16 then adjusts the proportional strengths of the electronic image

signals 20R, 20G and 20B with adjustable amplifiers 22R, 22G and 22B in order to balance the intensities of the red, green and blue image signals.

Figure 2 shows a circuit diagram of a white balance measurement unit WMH2 according to an embodiment of the invention. The white balance measuring unit WMH2 may be used in the white balance adjustment unit 4 according to the prior art in place of the white balance measuring unit WMH1.

Unlike the white balance measuring unit WMH1 of Figure 1, the white balance measuring unit WMH2 comprises LED sensors, namely a first LED L1 and a second LED L2. However, it is not necessary for the white balance measuring unit WMH2 to include colour filters since the LEDs act as intrinsic narrow band sensors. In the white balance measuring unit WMH2, a reverse voltage of 15 Volts is applied across a series combination of the first LED L1 and a first resistor R1 in such a way that the first LED L1 is reverse biased. Similarly, a reverse voltage of 15 Volts is applied across a series combination of the second LED L2 and a second resistor R2 in such a way that the second LED L2 is reverse biased. The reverse current of each LED is measured as a voltage difference (VR,VB) across the resistor in series with the reverse coupled LED. The voltage differences VR and VB are further amplified with amplifiers AR1 and AB1 and are thus measurable by the device of Figure 1, which receives these signals as inputs to block 44. The reverse voltage and the resistance of the resistors depend on the available supply voltage, the device using the white balance measurements and on the choice of the LEDs.

The operation of the white balance measuring unit WMH2 is based on measurement of the reverse current of an LED. The reverse current is responsive to the intensity of a light incident on the LED within a narrow frequency band. The colour band measured by an LED is inherent from its physical characteristics. The "measurement" band is not always the same as the colour band the LED would emit if it were used in forward bias to emit light. Thus, the first LED L1 is selected to have a measurement band that is appropriate for measuring the intensity of light

in a frequency band corresponding to blue light. The second LED L2 is selected to have a measurement band that is appropriate for intensity of light in a frequency band corresponding to red light. When the white balancing measurement unit WMH2 is used in place of the white balancing unit WMH1, the LEDs are selected so that their measurement bands correspond to the measurement bands of the white balance measuring unit WMH1.

In an alternative embodiment, a green measuring LED is used as the light intensity measuring sensor 33 for exposure measurement and control. Generally, green light correlates well with the total intensity of light and thus it can be used as a measure of light intensity, or exposure.

It should be appreciated that although a light intensity measuring sensor and two LEDs are used in this particular embodiment, other combinations may be used. The two light components to be separately measured can be any two of the three light components red, green and blue. In addition, a light intensity measuring detector comprising a combination of a filter and a photodetector according to the prior art can be used to measure the intensity of one colour, for example blue. Typically, an LED measurement of blue light intensity is less sensitive than corresponding measurements of red and green. Therefore, the blue colour measurement LED of Figure 2 is replaced with a green colour measurement LED in an alternative embodiment. In this case, the control part 16 derives information concerning the blue light intensity. The light intensity measuring sensor 33 responds to the sum of intensities of all colours, blue included, and the LED sensors provide an indication of the intensities of the two other light components. Thus, the total intensity that is not explained by red and green light components is interpreted as blue light intensity.

In another embodiment of the invention more than two or three LEDs are used to measure the light components. For example, five different colour bands could be measured to further improve the accuracy of the white balancing. The number of the LEDs to be used may be more than one. Use of three to five LEDs is

preferred. The white balancing may be improved by increasing the number of light component measurements.

In an embodiment of the invention, at least one LED is controlled to radiate light at certain periods of time and to sense intensity of a colour band at other periods of time. This is carried out by using a switching control unit that switches the LED either to sensing electronics or to illuminating electronics. In this way, the same LED may be used for white balance measurement and, for example, for indicating status information. In illumination use, the LED is used in a forward bias configuration as opposed to the sensor use, where the LED is used in a reverse bias configuration.

Figure 3 is a block diagram of a mobile station according to an embodiment of the invention. A microprocessor μP controls the blocks responsible for the mobile station's different functions: a random access memory RAM, a radio frequency block RF, a read only memory ROM, a user interface UI having a display DPL and a keyboard KBD, and a digital camera block CAM corresponding to the digital camera CAM shown in Figure 1. The microprocessor's operating instructions, that is program code and the mobile station's basic functions have been stored in the mobile station in advance, for example during the manufacturing process, in the ROM. In accordance with its program, the microprocessor uses the RF block for transmitting and receiving messages on a radio path. The microprocessor monitors the state of the user interface UI and controls the digital camera block CAM. The camera block CAM comprises a white balance adjustment device and a white balance measurement unit according to the invention. In response to a user command, the microprocessor instructs the camera block CAM to record a digital image into the RAM. Then, a user may command the mobile station to display the image on its display or to send the image using the RF block to another mobile station, wired telephone, facsimile device or another telecommunications device.

The term "LED" refers to a component well known for a person skilled in the art having a diode functionality which can emit light if connected to a sufficient forward

voltage. It should be appreciated that the LEDs used in the invention may not actually emit light or may not have been designed for such a purpose. However, in the interests of economy, the invention may use mass produced standard components in a way different to their intended use. It should also be appreciated that the invention is not restricted to use of discrete LED components, but also covers embodiments in which devices operating in a way corresponding to the operating principle of an LED are implemented as integrated circuits or integrated onto a Printed Circuit Board PCB.

10 Although optical filters are not necessary for LEDs to operate as narrow colour band light intensity sensors, they may be used to match the sensitivities of different types of LEDs. In this case, the same hardware that is designed to process the signal generated by the LEDs may be switched periodically to each one of the colour band intensity sensors. This may provide a further reduction in manufacturing costs.

20 This paper presents the implementation and embodiments of the invention with the help of examples. It is obvious to a person skilled in the art, that the invention is not restricted to details of the embodiments presented above, and that the invention can be implemented in another embodiment without deviating from the characteristics of the invention. Thus, the presented embodiments should be considered illustrative, but not restricting. Hence, the possibilities of implementing and using the invention are only restricted by the enclosed patent claims. Consequently, the various options of implementing the invention as determined by the claims, including the equivalent implementations, also belong to the scope of the present invention.